

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Two groups of Orthodox rabbis threatened to issue a religious edict banning visits to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as long as it includes information about gay victims of the Nazis. [Page 1]**

■ **Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov rejected an Israeli call to stop arms and technology sales to Iran and Syria. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued the call during a visit to Moscow. [Page 3]**

■ **The president of Uzbekistan told a group of visiting American Jewish leaders that his country was committed to countering the threats of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism from neighboring Afghanistan and Iran. He also said he was committed to having stable relations with Israel and the United States.**

■ **An Israeli soldier guarding the West Bank settlement of Omarim, south of Hebron, was repeatedly stabbed and seriously wounded. [Page 4]**

■ **U.S. officials said they would, if invited, attend a meeting in Gaza called by Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in the wake of what he termed Israeli violations of the peace accords. Meanwhile, Israel's defense minister downplayed tension with Jordan over King Hussein's warning that Israeli policy could explode the peace process. [Page 4]**

■ **Sweden agreed to cooperate with Jewish officials in a wide-ranging probe into the country's wartime dealings with the Nazis and its handling of Jewish-owned bank accounts.**

■ **A former head of the National Bank of Belgium was named by the government to lead a commission that will investigate the fate of Belgian Jewish assets from the World War II era.**

■ **The Swiss foreign minister is visiting the United States, one week after his nation announced that it would create a vast gold-based fund for victims of the Holocaust. Flavio Cotti plans to meet with Jewish leaders and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.**

Boycott of Holocaust museum threatened for gay inclusion

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two groups of Orthodox rabbis are threatening to issue a religious edict banning visits to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as long as it includes information about gay victims of the Nazis.

Rabbi Yehuda Levin, a representative of both groups — the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada and the Rabbinical Alliance of America — also testified on the matter last week before a congressional subcommittee in charge of allocating funds to the Holocaust memorial.

Levin called on Congress to withhold the annual \$25 to \$30 million in federal funds to the Holocaust memorial until the museum finds “a way to stop elevating the status of homosexuals to Jewish people.”

Each of the Manhattan-based rabbinical organizations claims to have more than 600 members, most of whom are right-of-center religious leaders.

If Congress does not act, Levin said, the rabbinical groups plan to issue the ban against visiting and to organize a boycott of the memorial.

Representatives of gay and lesbian Jewish groups responded to the Orthodox rabbis' effort with incredulity and anger.

Officials of the Holocaust memorial declined to comment on the new campaign.

But they said the memorial has taken pains to ensure that exhibits accurately reflect the extent of persecution of different communities.

This is not the first time that there have been efforts to exclude material about gay victims of the Holocaust from memorials.

The chairman of the Family Defense Council, Howard Hurwitz, has protested plans to include information about homosexual victims in New York City's Holocaust memorial, which is scheduled to open later this year.

In a statement issued Monday, the Union of Orthodox rabbis, said, “We strongly urge people not to visit museums that maintain exhibits glorifying homosexuality.

“We declare that the Torah absolutely prohibits the viewing by anyone, especially children, of such homosexual exhibits that insult and desecrate the memory of the millions of innocent victims of the Holocaust,” the statement said.

“It's a perversion” to include material about gay victims of the Holocaust, Levin said at the congressional hearing last week. “Do we have a prostitutes' exhibit?”

Calls for the truth to be told

Between 10,000 and 15,000 homosexuals were killed by the Nazis.

To compare that number “with 6 million Jews or even Gypsies and others targeted for elimination is an outrage,” Levin said in an interview.

Homosexuals “were not rounded up, were not gassed, and many were paramours of guards” at the labor and death camps where they were imprisoned, said Levin, who last year served as honorary chairman of Patrick Buchanan's presidential campaign.

Each year, he addresses the anti-abortion protesters who march in Washington on the anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

Levin, who lives in Brooklyn, also ran for mayor of New York City in 1985, on the Right-to-Life ticket, and is considering a run in the upcoming Democratic mayoral primary here.

Levin said inclusion in the Holocaust memorials is part of a strategy by a “political homosexual network” to gain mainstream acceptance.

Representatives of gay and lesbian Jewish groups dismissed that claim.

“The only pressure that exists from the gay and lesbian Jewish community is that the truth be told and that the historical record be clear,” said Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, leader of Manhattan's main gay and lesbian synagogue and a member of the Holocaust memorial's Lesbian and Gay Planning Committee.

The committee has raised about \$1.5 million for the Holocaust memorial in the last two years, she said. “Nobody's trying to equate” the

scale of Jewish and gay suffering under Nazism, Kleinbaum said.

Lee Walzer, vice president of the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations, said, "To call for a boycott of such an august institution as the U.S. Holocaust museum is regrettable in the extreme. These rabbis should know better than to engage in this type of hateful, incendiary rhetoric," Walzer said.

His organization claims to represent 15,000 people in 65 gay and lesbian Jewish groups in North America, Israel and around the world.

Rabbi Steven Dworken, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America, which represents more than 1,000 Orthodox rabbis, also took issue with Levin's groups.

"No one has a right to kill someone else and annihilate them no matter what their beliefs are," Dworken said.

According to Orthodox Judaism, homosexuality is "an aberrant lifestyle and cannot be accorded any type of legitimacy," Dworken said.

"However, to try to dissuade the U.S. population from learning the lessons of the Holocaust because of this would be a mistake."

A spokeswoman for the museum, Mary Morrison, said there is no special section singling out homosexual victims of the Nazis.

She cited as an example of their inclusion a wall in the museum's permanent exhibit that is full of small photographs of Holocaust victims, the overwhelming majority of which portray Jews.

Some of the photographs are of men who were gay and persecuted for that reason.

"The primary focus is on Jewish victims, because that's primarily who it happened to," she said, adding, "It is impossible to leave the museum and not know that the overwhelming number of victims were Jews."

Morrison said that even if the Orthodox rabbinical organizations start boycotting the museum, it likely would not make much difference in the attendance. Some 80 percent of the 2 million people who visit the federal institution each year are not Jewish, she said. □

Mubarak uses Washington visit to lash out at Israeli policies

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had wanted to focus on U.S.-Egyptian relations during his visit this week with President Clinton.

But with Palestinians and Israelis once again in the midst of a crisis in their negotiations, the Middle East peace process took center stage.

During three hours of White House meetings, Mubarak and Clinton trained their attention on the mounting Palestinian criticism that too little of the West Bank was being transferred to Palestinian self-rule.

Mubarak himself expressed anger over Israel's redeployment plans as well as over the Israeli government's recent decision to build Jewish housing in eastern Jerusalem and to close four Palestinian offices in Jerusalem.

Standing next to Clinton at an East Room news conference, Mubarak blamed Israel for making the peace process "a fragile and vulnerable one."

Hinting at a possibly violent Palestinian response to the latest developments, Mubarak said, "Our purpose here is to eliminate all potential sources of tension and violence."

Clinton joined Mubarak in stepping up the criticism of Israel.

In an apparent swipe at Israel for arriving at decisions without consulting first with the Palestinians, Clinton decried those who "attempt to preclude the process of negotiations or pre-empt it or are insensitive to the needs and the feelings of people in the negotiating process."

Clinton's statements upset Israeli representatives in Washington who have listened for weeks as administration officials have intensified their criticism of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies.

Clinton expressed similar sentiments last week during his meetings with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

In the most recent indication of official U.S. reaction to the latest developments, the State Department has begun to refer to the site of the new housing project exclusively by its Arabic name, Jamal Abu Ghena'im, rather than by its Hebrew name, Har Homa.

Clinton himself fueled tensions by saying, "It's obvious that who owns the land is disputed."

While Clinton gave Mubarak a White House platform to criticize Israel, members of Congress protested to the Egyptian leader their growing frustration with Egypt's peace policies.

"Egypt has turned up the heat in the Arab world against Israel and President Mubarak will be told that that's not acceptable," said an aide to a member of Congress who met with Mubarak on Tuesday.

Jewish groups also planned to address the matter with Mubarak in a Wednesday meeting.

"Many in our community, and frankly, many in the Congress, have concerns about an erosion of Egyptian leadership for peace," said Jason Isaacson, director of international and governmental affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

"We have grave concerns about the posture Egypt has struck in recent months regarding Hebron and further redeployment," said Isaacson, who was one of the Jewish officials scheduled to meet with Mubarak.

At the same time, representatives of the Anti-Defamation League planned to discuss anti-Semitism in the Egyptian media at the meeting with Mubarak.

The ADL released a report on anti-Semitism in the Egyptian media and ran a full-page ad in The New York Times to coincide with Mubarak's visit.

"Egypt led the Arab world in reconciling with Israel, and was expected to lead its population and the rest of the Arab world in changing public attitudes towards Jews and Israel," said Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director.

"That expectation has not yet been realized." □

Israeli military to strengthen ties with South Africa, Thailand

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, left this week for visits to South Africa and Thailand to try to strengthen Israel's military ties with the two states.

Israel has been concerned by a South African proposal to sell tank firing systems to Syria.

In another development, Turkey's defense minister is due to visit Israel next month.

During the past year, Israel and Turkey strengthened their military ties with a number of cooperation agreements — including plans for joint air maneuvers in Turkish air space — that have drawn sharp criticism from Arab states.

Last month, the two countries launched a \$632.5 million project in which Israel will upgrade 54 Turkish F-4 fighter jets. □

Netanyahu offers Russia trade to end arms transfers to Syria*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit here this week came at a time when Russia is trying to raise its profile in the Middle East.

Netanyahu sought to prevent an expansion of Russian ties with the region's Muslim nations during his first official visit here.

Support for the Arab bloc was one of the cornerstones of the former Soviet Union's foreign policy.

During meetings Tuesday with President Boris Yeltsin, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, Netanyahu offered the promise of enhanced bilateral trade in exchange for an end to Russia's transfer of nuclear technology and weaponry to Iran and Syria.

But Primakov told the Israeli premier that he rejected his call to stop arms and technology sales to Iran and Syria.

Netanyahu also sought to have Russia influence Damascus to renew the stalled Israeli-Syrian talks, which were broken off a year ago.

Netanyahu came to the Russian capital reportedly bearing a multi-billion dollar proposal to buy Russian natural gas in exchange for an end to the sales of Russian nuclear technology and arms.

Russia has made no secret of its plans to boost arms sales abroad.

But it also is trying to find new markets for its vast gas resources.

Russian sales of nuclear technology to Iran, including recent sales of nuclear reactors, have angered Israel and the United States, which say that Iran intends to use Russian technology to make nuclear weapons.

Moscow, however, has rejected the accusations, saying the technology could only be used for civilian purposes.

Since last year, Moscow has been involved in the construction of a nuclear power plant at Bandar-e Bushehr, an Iranian city located on the Persian Gulf.

With Russia's nuclear industry facing a severe financial crisis, the country's nuclear energy minister said earlier this year that he wants to increase exports of nuclear technology.

Moscow also has been busily promoting sales of military hardware in an effort to rebuild its military industry.

Netanyahu, Yeltsin make upbeat comments

Russia was recently reported to be helping Syria modernize its army by selling Damascus a variety of arms.

Despite their differences, Netanyahu and Yeltsin were upbeat in their comments to reporters.

Israel and Russia have passed the stage of "mutual prejudices in bilateral relations," said Yeltsin, adding that the two countries have "energetically moved toward each other."

He said that bilateral trade, which stood at \$300 million in 1996, "with goodwill on both sides could increase significantly."

For his part, Netanyahu saw significance in the fact that he was "meeting with the very president of the country, after very complicated relations over the past 50 years."

Netanyahu's 25-member delegation included several prominent Israeli businessmen who came to discuss expanded trade.

Similar discussions took place when Israeli Trade

Minister Natan Sharansky visited the Russian capital in late January.

In his talks with Russia's top three officials, Netanyahu also discussed their differences over the Middle East peace process.

Since 1991, Russia has been a co-sponsor of the peace process along with the United States.

When Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat visited Moscow last month, Yeltsin voiced his support for an independent Palestinian state.

During a joint news conference with Primakov, Netanyahu defended Israeli plans to build a controversial new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem, a move that Palestinian leaders said this week is bringing the peace process to the brink of a crisis.

"This kind of doomsday talk and the whole histrionic attitude towards obvious disagreement is itself not conducive to the [peace] process," Netanyahu said. "We have disagreement. We cannot at every stage of this agreement engage in cataclysmic predictions and talk of crisis and violence."

Netanyahu urged the two sides to focus instead on fulfilling their obligations under the signed accords.

Russia had irked Israel when it supported a U.N. Security Council resolution, vetoed by the United States last Friday, criticizing the decision to build the new neighborhood.

Netanyahu began Tuesday by meeting with members of Moscow's Jewish community at the city's Choral Synagogue.

Thousands of Jews packed the synagogue's main hall and gave the Israeli premier a standing ovation.

Passing through the crowd that came to greet him, Netanyahu noticed someone holding a box of matzot.

"Not so long ago, to bake matzot, to have matzot at home, to eat matzot, was considered a crime in the Soviet Union," Netanyahu said, referring to the profound changes that have occurred in the life of Russian Jews since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Netanyahu said that rabbis and teachers of religion had "saved the Jewish tradition in Soviet Russia," singling out the underground religious activities of the Lubavitch movement during the Communist era.

The premier's visit to Russia's largest synagogue appeared to have strong personal meaning for some of those who saw him.

Alexei, a 16-year-old student at a Moscow Jewish school, said that his grandfather still cherishes the memory of meeting the then-Israeli ambassador to Moscow, Golda Meir, at the Choral Synagogue almost 50 years ago.

"He often says that the meeting in 1948 had influenced his entire life," said Alexei. "I will also long have memories about meeting the Israeli prime minister in the same synagogue."

Netanyahu was expected to conclude his two days in Russia with a visit to St. Petersburg before returning to Jerusalem on Wednesday evening. □

Israeli soldier moderately wounded*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli soldier was moderately wounded Monday in a roadside explosion in southern Lebanon.

The explosion occurred near an Israeli patrol in the central sector of the security zone.

The wounded soldier was evacuated to a hospital in Israel.

After the explosion, Hezbollah gunmen fired mortar and anti-tank missiles at positions of the South Lebanon Army, Israel's ally in the region. □

Israeli-Palestinian ties strained as ire over redeployment mounts

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Arab anger is seething in the wake of Israel's redeployment decision and plans to build in eastern Jerusalem.

The Cabinet voted 10-7 last Friday to turn over 9 percent of rural West Bank areas to the Palestinian Authority.

That decision followed Israel's announcement that it would build 6,500 Jewish housing units at Har Homa in eastern Jerusalem.

The latest moves by the Israeli government have elicited sharp criticism from Jordan's King Hussein and Palestinian appeals to the international community to intervene in the peace process.

During a visit to Russia this week, Netanyahu said of the Arab reaction: "This kind of doomsday talk and the whole histrionic attitude towards obvious disagreement is itself not conducive to the [peace] process.

"We have disagreement," the prime minister said. "We cannot at every stage of this agreement engage in cataclysmic predictions and talk of crisis and violence."

Jordan's King Hussein — traditionally Israel's closest friend in the region — sent a letter to Netanyahu saying that the premier had committed "accumulated acts of a tragic nature" and that the recent Israeli construction and redeployment decisions could destroy the peace process.

"Peace, which is the most important aim of my life, appears more and more like a distant mirage," the official Jordanian news agency Petra quoted the king as saying in the letter.

Jordanian officials, meanwhile, broadly hinted that the crisis with the Palestinians could affect Jordan's relations with Israel.

The two countries signed a historic peace treaty in 1994.

Israel downplays tensions with Jordan

"The peace process is going through crisis, a real crisis," Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Kabariti said after talks Tuesday in Amman with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

"We warn of unilateral moves that could lead us to difficult choices," Kabariti added.

Mordechai downplayed tensions with Jordan, saying there were misunderstandings that he believed could be overcome.

Palestinian officials, meanwhile, sharply criticized what they said was an insubstantial transfer of West Bank lands to their control.

They charged that the Cabinet decision was meaningless because much of the land to be transferred was already under their civilian control. Two percent of the land to be transferred would come from areas that now are under full Israeli control.

"Israel is pushing us into a corner, making us desperate," Mohammad Dahlan, head of the Palestinian security service in the Gaza Strip, told the Israeli daily Ma'ariv. "The street is heating up and about to boil."

The Hebron agreement, signed in January, stipulates that Israel make three redeployments from the West Bank before mid-1998.

But the accord does not detail the extent of the redeployments, which Israel and the United States say is up to the Jewish state alone to determine.

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat rejected the Israeli transfer of West Bank lands, leaving uncertain when — or if — the planned transfer would take place.

Palestinian officials have denied reports that Arafat suspended all contacts with the Jewish state, but it remained unlikely that the final-status negotiations would resume next week as originally called for in the Hebron accord.

On Tuesday, Arafat invited diplomats from the United States, Russia and the European Union to join Arab representatives in Gaza this weekend to discuss how to salvage the peace process.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the United States would attend the Gaza meeting "if an invitation is formally issued."

Foreign Minister David Levy warned that any resort to international pressure was a clear violation of the peace accords, which "state that all matters in dispute between Israel and the Palestinians will be resolved by the sides in negotiations."

The increased tensions were underscored by a stabbing attack early Tuesday morning in the West Bank, when a 19-year-old Israeli soldier guarding the Omarim settlement south of Hebron sustained severe wounds in the head and chest after repeated stabbings by two assailants.

He was listed in serious but stable condition at Soroka Hospital in Beersheba.

Israeli security forces carrying out searches in the Palestinian village of Dahariya arrested a number of suspects. □

Israel apologizes for incident between Indyk, Knesset member

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Israeli Foreign Ministry has formally apologized for an incident in which a member of the Knesset hurled an anti-Semitic epithet at U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, himself a Jew.

Still smarting from being called a "yehudon" by Rehavam Ze'evi during a recent parliamentary session on the peace process, Indyk reportedly stared the right-wing Knesset member down at a chance meeting last week.

Ephraim Sneh, a Labor Party member of Knesset who was nearby, told reporters that Indyk turned to Ze'evi and said, "The last time someone called me a Jew boy I was 15 years old and he got a punch in the face."

Ze'evi, a member of the right-wing Moledet Party replied, "Try me," and again called Indyk to his face "yehudon," apparently for pressuring Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians.

According to Sneh, Indyk shot back, "You are a disgrace to the State of Israel," to which Ze'evi replied in English: "And you are a son of a bitch."

After the ceremony where the exchange took place, Ze'evi approached Indyk and apologized.

The exchange prompted a rare Foreign Ministry statement criticizing a Knesset member. In addition, the ministry's director general, Eitan Ben Tsur, called Indyk to apologize.

Indyk, a former official of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and a rising star in the U.S. diplomatic corps, is on the short list to become assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, the top post for Mideast policy.

The State Department had its own reaction to the flap.

Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said, "I won't repeat what the gentleman said, I mean if I call him a gentleman."

Everyone who knows Indyk knows that "he's an honorable person, he does not deserve to be insulted publicly.

"He represents the president," Burns said. □